

Career Path

Cooking up a successful career

by Norman Yam



Timothy Broderick,
executive chef, Great
Food Hall

Photo: Edde Ngan

With 25 years' experience working in reputable restaurants around the world, Timothy Broderick knows it takes more than culinary skills to reach the top in the food and beverage business.

Cooking, in fact, accounts for only a portion of the myriad responsibilities he performs as executive chef at Great Food Hall, a food concept and international food hall in the basement of Pacific Place.

"On average, I cook only 12 hours a week these days, compared with 12 to 16 hours a day earlier in my career," Mr Broderick says. "Today, most of my work hours are spent selecting fresh produce sold in the store, such as fish, meat and vegetables, with the assistance of my team." This is a hectic routine for someone having to work around a busy promotional calendar. The range of food selections offered at the Great Food Hall varies from season to season, with customer orders reaching a high during major festive periods like Easter and Christmas.

Overseeing food concepts is an integral part of Mr Broderick's job. Recently, he added Blue Elephant, an upmarket brand of gourmet Thai food products, to the 50,000 different items from around the world that are now on sale.

"It is necessary for us to micro-manage each of our points of service, and we do this through staff training in food knowledge and sales and communication skills," he explains. "Part of my job is to draw up sales forecasts for each individual section of the store, together with strategies to attain those goals. This means that communication and inter-personal skills are an essential element in reaching out to customers. I must also work closely with the general manager on sales issues, and with the various department heads to enhance the attractiveness of our products and our service quality. Plus, I must always try to pre-empt operational problems before they arise."

Well-seasoned

No two days are the same for Mr Broderick. During busy periods like Christmas, he finds himself having to "virtually undertake a 36-hour shift", fielding over 100 phone calls in a single day and ensuring thousands of pre-ordered foodstuffs and other products are delivered to customers in the correct quality and quantity.

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Mr Broderick's life has always centred on food. "As a child, I enjoyed making pancakes and waffles in my family kitchen, and invited friends over to enjoy these little treats", he says. Born and raised in New York, he worked on a friend's lobster boat during summer breaks. This vacation job required the teenager to deliver live seafood to restaurants, thereby introducing him to the professional kitchen.

One of his first jobs was at Fire Island's Seashore Inn, after a Thai chef noted his enthusiasm and took him on as an apprentice cook. His love for adventure later took him on a globe-trotting odyssey to Australia, Europe, Fiji, Hawaii, Russia, the UK and Southeast Asia where he picked up an assortment of traditional cooking styles and techniques from different cultures.

In 1993, he joined the Culinary Institute of America while holding a full-time position with the legendary Le Cirque, one of the world's best fine-dining restaurants. Other prestigious dining establishments he worked for include Windows on the World in the former World Trade Centre of New York and the upscale French bistro La Fourchette in Manhattan.

In Hong Kong, before taking up his present post, he was chef de cuisine at the Mandarin Oriental and the Ritz-Carlton, and also Western executive chef of the members-only Pacific Club under Wharf Holdings.

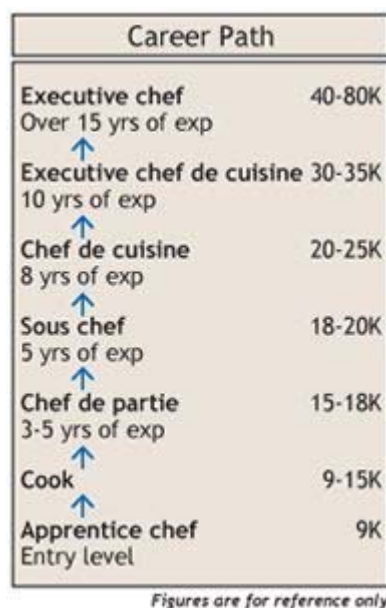
Daily grind

Breaking into the food and beverage industry is not hard, Mr Broderick says. It is not easy, though, to become successful. "For the first few years, you can forget about weekends, a night out in town, girlfriends and holidays. Occasionally, you must work through the night, never seeing the break of day," he adds.

Mr Broderick recommends that interested school-leavers go to a culinary school for a formal education in the culinary field. "Newcomers should learn the basics first, such as the theories of food and gastronomy, and acquire a sound knowledge of the wide range of ingredients involved," he says.

University graduates will be able to fast-track their way into management positions. For such potential executives, a solid knowledge of food and beverage accounting principles may be even more important than culinary proficiency. However, if they plan to scale the corporate ladder via the kitchen alone, then the odds are against them.

Although there is a lack of culinary education at the tertiary level in Hong Kong, Mr Broderick believes that university graduates will have a major role to play in the future of the local food and beverage sector. "Put simply, the process of getting the right fresh products here from abroad requires a phenomenal number of goal-driven professionals," he concludes.



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